

# Ames Historical Society

AMES • IOWA

Newsletter to Members  
2014 SUMMER...ISSUE #3/4

*Discovering our history,  
Preserving our past,  
Sharing our stories.*



Historic 1857 machine shop of  
the Ames Shovel Company,  
North Easton, Massachusetts

#### Ames Historical Society Board:

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The Board meets the 2nd Thursday of each month 6:45pm at 416 Douglas. Members welcome!

**Executive Director** Casie Vance  
**Staff** Alex Fejfar, Hannah Frederick  
**Collections Manager** Sarah Carlson  
**Newsletter Editor** Kathy Svec

Ames Historical Society is an incorporated, 501c3 not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting interest in local and state history through publications, programs, exhibitions, collections, archives and a historic site.

**Headquarters:** 416 Douglas, Ames, IA 50010  
Open Mon-Fri, 1-5pm, Sat 10am-4pm  
**Mail:** PO Box 821, Ames, IA 50010  
**Phone:** 515-232- 2148  
**E-mail:** info@ameshistory.org  
**Website:** www.AmesHistory.org  
**Facebook:** www.facebook.com/ameshistoricalsociety

The **newsletter** is published four times a year for AHS members. Direct comments and questions to: Editor, PO Box 821, Ames, IA 50010 or e-mail above.

**Hoggatt School** is located on the grounds of Meeker School, near 18<sup>th</sup> and Burnett, Ames, Iowa. Due to construction at Meeker School, Hoggatt will be closed during the summers of 2014 and 2015.

## Unveiling Three Special Exhibits For the Sesquicentennial!

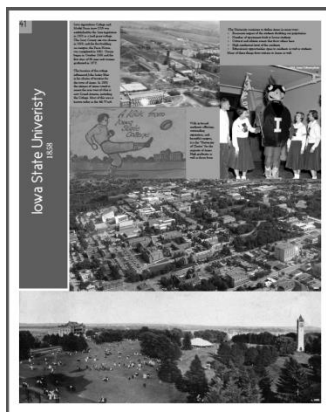
DEFINING AMES  
150<sup>historic</sup>  
people, places & events  
1864-2014

August 4 - October 25

Business Signs  
From Past Times

August 4 - September 27

The Society's extensive sesquicentennial exhibits will be on view at the Octagon Center for the Arts, 427 Douglas, Ames, our project partner.



**"DEFINING AMES: 150 historic people, places and events 1864-2014"** will be in the third floor Main Gallery from August 4 through October 25. It will feature display panels and artifacts highlighting 150 unique aspects of our town's past. Among many artifacts featured will be the restored 1880 portrait of town founder, John Blair and an ~1865 shovel manufactured by the Ames Shovel Company of Easton, MA – the company owned by our town's namesake.

In the third floor Sweeney Gallery will be **Interactive Exhibits** and the Ames railyard model showing how the area behind Main Street used to look in the 1930s and 40s.

**"Business Signs from Past Times."** will be in the ground floor Community Gallery. It will showcase many pieces from our extensive collection of vintage business signs, with accompanying information about the businesses featured. It will be on display from August 4 to September 27.

## Please Join Us for the the Gala Opening & Fundraiser! Sat., August 2, 7-8:30pm!

We **invite** our members and their guests to **join us** for our annual fundraiser and Grand Opening of the Sesquicentennial exhibits. It will give attendees a special **preview** of the displays and will feature **musical** entertainment and **desserts** by Cupcake Emporium, Chocolaterie Stam, Aunt Maude's and +39 in addition to wine and Burgie's coffee.

Costumed **characters** from Ames history will spice up the displays and Wendy and Doug Livy will share the **history** of their business, Quality Motors.

Plan to take a few chances in the **raffle** for a print of the Linda Emerson commissioned Sesquicentennial papercut.



During a short program, the Farwell T. Brown **Award for Exceptional Service** to Ames Historical Society will be presented. The Gala is \$60/person and reservations are **due** July 28. Call 515-232-2148 if you did not receive an invitation and need information.

# Sesquicentennial News!



## Sesqui Exhibit Gallery Talks: Mark Your Calendars Now!

During the run of the Sesquicentennial exhibits, an exciting series of gallery talks will be presented in the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor Main Gallery at the Octagon Center for the Arts, 427 Douglas.

**Tue., Aug. 26, 7pm:** 150 Years in 50 Minutes: An Overview of Ames History by Margaret Vance, Ames Historical Society volunteer researcher

**Thu., Sept. 4, 7pm :** By the Side of the Road: How Transportation Shaped Ames by Jeff Benson, Lincoln Highway Historian

**Thu., Sept. 18, 7pm:** Culture Under Canvas: Chautauqua Comes to Ames by Train & Tent by Dr. Charles R. Kniker, ISU Emeritus Professor of Education

**Thu., Oct. 2, 7pm:** The Ames Connection to World War II's Manhattan Project by Kathy Svec, daughter of a Project Researcher, with Steve Karsjen

**Thu., Oct. 16, 7pm:** Ames Has Been Home to Many by Sharon Wirth, Historic Old Town Neighborhood Association and Peter D. Englin, Ph.D., Director of Residence at Iowa State University

**Sun. Oct. 19: 2pm,** Ted Kooser Poetry Reading & Book Signing: Ames native and former U.S. Poet Laureate



## More About the Sesqui Exhibit

“Defining Ames: 150 historical people, places & events 1864-2014” will feature 10 categories of local stories:

- **Founding Our Town** – includes Story County mills, first depot, house, passenger train & more
- **Educating Our Youth** – includes country schools & all levels through college
- **Getting Around** – includes highway commission, Wilson Highway, street extensions & more
- **Moving Forward** - includes 4<sup>th</sup> Ward annexation, street paving, electric plant & more
- **Gathering Places** – includes Carr’s Pool, opera houses, Skateland, Pammel Court & more
- **Fascinating Personalities** - includes Abe Mezvinsky, Terrones family, Maria Pearson & more
- **Serving The Public** – includes Ames Canning Co., Hach Chemical, eateries, newspapers & more
- **Recalling Events** – includes fires, floods, circuses, Gingko Festival, Manhattan Project & more
- **Enriching the Community** – includes gardens, WOI radio & TV, Ames Drag Strip & more
- **Interesting Facts** – includes first telephone, bathtub, street lights, parking meters & more

The public opening reception will be **Fri., August 22, 5:30-7:30pm.**

## Upcoming Sesquicentennial Fun

Great fun was had by people of all ages during the 3-day celebration over the 4<sup>th</sup> of July – but there is more to come! The calendar is being updated and detailed information can be found on the Sesquicentennial website at **www.Ames150.com.**



Currently listed are:

- **Senior Variety Show**, Fri. & Sun., August 15 & 17
- **Cemetery Walk**, Sun. Sept. 21, 2:30pm
- **Dinkey Day**, September 26 in Campustown.
- **Platting Day**, December 17 marking the day 150 years ago when the town was laid out.
- **More to Come – keep checking!**

## Sesqui Legacy Project

Long after the 150<sup>th</sup> celebration is over, the 16-foot **History Trailer** will be a lasting reminder of our town’s milestone. Once the interior is fitted out, it will be a mobile programming unit that can transport artifacts and displays and show videos and slide shows. Lead donor was First National Bank; other major sponsors were Adams Funeral Home, Alpha Copies, H.L. Munn Lumber Company and Nelson Electric.

## Headquarters Happenings – Around 416 Douglas

### Historical Society Commissions Sesquicentennial Art Piece

The commissioned papercut by Ames artist Linda Emmerson has been received and will be displayed in the Sesquicentennial exhibit at the Octagon Center for the Arts from August 4 through October 25.

The artwork is done in the Swiss style of “Scherenschnitte” (scissors cuts) and measures 21” x 28.5.” It features dozens of tiny, intricate details.



Emmerson's artwork is well-known around Ames and the Society is pleased to have such a significant memento of our town's 150<sup>th</sup>.

Poster sized prints, 16” x 20”, are available in the Museum Shop for \$15. Choose from black or maroon.

### Current History Center Exhibits

Exhibits at the Ames History Center change every month, so there is always something new to see!

#### FEATURE EXHIBIT:

- Is This the Dinkey?

#### HERITAGE exhibits:

- Where it All Began: The Prairie in Ames
- 1915 City Hall
- Roosevelt School
- The Building of the Sheldon-Munn Hotel
- Camp Fire Girls
- A Boarding House of Equality: The Martin Family
- Tires Through Time: The Story of Bicycles in Ames
- Celebrating 100 Years: The Ames Centennial, 1964



Alan Spohnheimer drove a 1919 Model T Ford truck in the July 4<sup>th</sup> Parade, assisted by Margaret Vance and Sarah Carlson.

### Events Follow-up

● **The Book Sale** on May 30 & 31 netted \$472 for History Center programs! *Sincere thanks* to members who donated and purchased books at this annual event.

● **Iowa Museum Week Open House**, June 11, hosted 18 mostly young people who enjoyed learning how to make Camp Fire Girl “sit-upons.”

● **Community Ice Cream Social**, June 21, was a happy event on a beautiful day enjoyed by 137 visitors. Watch for this again next year!

### Events Coming Up

#### ● Sat. August 23, 1pm, at the History Center Wedding Dress Preservation Class

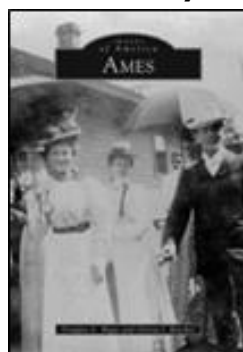
Learn from Kate Greder how to preserve your special family dresses. \$5; register in advance by calling 515-232-2148. Supplies available for purchase at class.

#### ● Sun. Sept 21, 2:30pm, at Ames Cemetery Cemetery Walk

Costumed readers will tell the stories of ten of our town's Civil War veteran pioneers. Bring a lawn chair. Rain date: October 5, 2:30pm. Free.

## Museum Shop

Many unique items!



**NEW BOOK:** Images of America - AMES  
by Douglas L. Biggs, Gloria J. Betcher

**NEW:** Sesquicentennial tote bags,  
wine charms and water bottles

**DVD:** *Stitched Into Time:*  
*Remembering Collegiate Manufacturing Company*

Also: Society t-shirts  
“Song of Ames” magnets; Children's activity books  
All of Farwell Brown's books about Ames

Open Mon-Fri 1-5pm, Sat 10am-4pm  
or by appointment, 515-232-2148

### Hoggatt Programs Cancelled

Due to circumstances beyond our control, Hoggatt School programs scheduled on Sunday afternoons at the Ames History Center have been cancelled for the rest of the summer.



This includes all programs scheduled through August 24. Organizers deeply regret these cancellations.

Hoggatt continues to be surrounded by construction at its 20<sup>th</sup> Street site and will be off-limits through 2015.

### Remembering Younkers

In the last newsletter, we noted the loss by fire of the venerable downtown Des Moines Younkers store. Several people sent their recollections:

**From Ted Kooser:** "My father, Ted Kooser, Sr., was the manager of the Ames Younkers store for many years. He said that groups of women from Ames would drive to the Des Moines store, have lunch at the Tea Room, then each would try to outdo the others by spending the most lavishly on clothing and accessories. Then, Dad said, on Mondays, one by one, they would self-consciously trail into his Ames store to return what they'd bought. He thought this was wonderfully amusing."



**From Sudi Wickersham Johnson,** about her grandmother, Neva Morris, and mother, Janie Morris Wickersham: "They loved going to Des Moines to shop at Younkers, declaring, 'It doesn't cost anything to go to Younkers!' This implied that they 'just went to look' but somehow they never came back without bags!"



### Correction

Following up on Nancy Bowers' story in the last newsletter about the 1948 unsolved murder of Henry Chavis, there is a correction to the website where readers wanting to learn more should go: "Iowa Unsolved Murders: Historic Cases" at [www.iowaunsolvedmurders.com](http://www.iowaunsolvedmurders.com) - search by Story County.

### Going for 150!

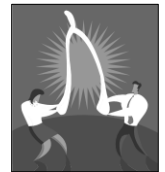
The Society is pleased to have 544 active members and we'd love to add 150 more during our sesquicentennial year! Inquire about our special program if you'd like to give gift memberships. Call 515-232-2148 or [info@ameshistory.org](mailto:info@ameshistory.org). Introductory memberships are \$15.

### Wish List Follow-up

Several more items on our Wish List have come through the door!

**Profuse thanks go to:**

- Julie Brockert for an 8mm cassette player-recorder.
- Iowa Subway Development for a used HP All-in-one TouchSmart computer. It will be a public computer that will also run a display of photos.



**Still on the Wish List are:**

- Compact-VHS to VHS converter
- A subscription to Newspaperarchive.com
- Funding for a regular student internship position
- Donations to begin a collections acquisitions fund so that we can purchase choice items. With the prevalence of online auctions, artifacts are now being sold by owners rather than being donated.

Contact us at 515-232-2148 or [info@ameshistory.org](mailto:info@ameshistory.org) if you can help!

### Report on Volunteers

Volunteer coordinator, Hannah Frederick, is tracking the contributions of our many volunteers who contribute to our operations in numerous ways.

- May volunteer hours: 276.87 – a \$4,859 value
- June volunteer hours: 445.4 – a \$7,817 value!

**We love our dedicated volunteers!**

### Now Open Saturdays!

In addition to our Monday through Friday, 1-5pm open hours, the Ames History Center is now open Saturdays from 10am to 4pm. Stop in to see NEW exhibits, browse the Museum Shop, watch a few short videos or browse our digital vintage Ames photo collection!

## Headquarters Happenings – Around 416 Douglas

### A New Local History Book



A new book on local history debuted in June. “Images of America: AMES” was authored by Douglas L. Biggs and Gloria J. Betcher of Ames and published by Arcadia Publishing. The book is largely pictures with informative captions and is an overview of Ames history up to the

present day. It is \$20 and is on sale in our Museum Shop and at major retailers. Biggs and Betcher (left & center at their June book signing) are donating proceeds the Ames Historical Society.

### Visitors!



Former Ames resident, **Roger Goetz** visited on June 24 and took time to examine his collection housed in the Society's archives.

Roger has established a special Endowment Fund

for the Society in memory of his parents.

Visitors from the Pacific Northwest were passing through Ames on June 13 and dropped by to satisfy their curiosity about local history. Learning that our guests were folk singers, Dennis Wendell invited them to retrieve their instruments and give an impromptu performance. Operations Assistant, Alex Fejfar later joined **Avery Hill** (banjo) and **Dan Weber** (guitar) by playing a guitar in our collection. Hill and Weber are independent solo performers who joined up for a tour doing gigs in private homes.



Although they were to play in Hampton that evening, they took time to make a 30-minute live recording at KHOI's new studio next door. Hill is from Portland, Oregon; Weber from Vancouver, Washington.

### A.E. Siedleemann



Former Ames Police Chief, Arnold E. Siedelmann died on April 9 in Florida. He started as a patrolman and quickly advanced to Chief, serving from 1966-84. In 1969, he attended the FBI Academy at Quantico, VA in the first class, with a graduation ceremony in the East Room of the White House under Presi-

dent Nixon. Former police officer, Terry Doyle, said, “He was my first Chief of Police in Ames and hired me personally. He was a thoughtful and kind man, at times absent-minded, but in the best way. I have many fond memories of him!”

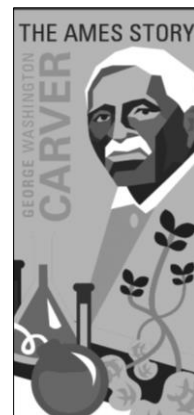


### Sesqui Banners

For the Sesquicentennial, a committee worked with ISU Graphic Design Practicum student Emerald Klauer to design light pole banners for Main Street.

The project is the result of a 6-month effort by Historic Preservation Commission members Roberta Vann and Sharon Wirth, Main Street Cultural District Board members Frank Randall and Judy Gilger and ISU Graphic Design faculty, Cheri Ure. The bright, colorful banners portray the Dinkey, Parley Sheldon, Mary Greeley, Wallace Greeley, George Washington Carver, Cynthia Duff and one says "Sesquicentennial Anniversary 150".

The 100 banners will remain up through the end of the year and can be used long term to help the community learn about its history.



### Remembering Fire Fighter, David Sills

*By Josh Bennett, City of Ames firefighter*

Every fire department in the country has experienced the loss of a firefighter. Most of the time these firefighters are retired and have enjoyed a lengthy, well-deserved retirement.

Sometimes they pass at a younger age due to circumstances unrelated to the job. While the passing of a firefighter is always heartbreaking and unfortunate, few fire departments must undergo the particularly traumatizing experience of losing a fellow employee while actively engaged in serving the public.

The Ames Fire Department has undergone such a loss.

It is out of respect for the fallen everywhere that we remember not only the sacrifice given, but who they are as people. For they are not just names inscribed on a memorial but were living, breathing human beings who left behind their unfinished lives, their loved ones, and a legacy that must always be remembered.



*409 Douglas as it appeared in 1928*

In the early morning hours of February 15, 1952, smoke began issuing from the basement of the Harrison Publishing building at 409 Douglas Avenue.

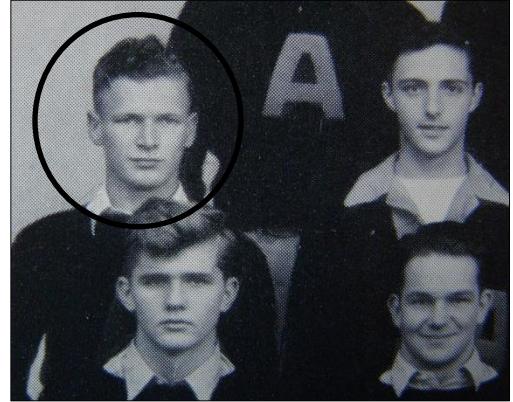
A passerby notices the smoke and runs around the corner to alert the men at the Fire Station just half a block away. Within seconds the fire crews turn out two trucks and round the corner, to be greeted by a wall of smoke.

The events of that night will forever be etched into the history of the Ames Fire Department and the city itself.

### The Firefighter

David William Sills was born the third of seven children in Ames on July 14, 1925, son of Archie and Alma Sills.

He was a very bright young man and a gifted athlete, earning honors as a member of the debate team, and on the track field with the Little Cyclones. As a freshman he ran the half-mile on the school's state championship team in 1941. At that time he was one of the few Little Cyclone athletes ever to win a major letter as a freshman.



His desire to serve the people around him was on display immediately after his junior year of high school. During the height of the Second World War, David left high school to join the Coast Guard in 1943 deploying as a Radarman 3<sup>rd</sup> Class to Iceland, South America, and the South Pacific.

After the war had been won, he finished his senior year of high school, graduating from Clarion High School in 1947. He then returned to Ames and for the next three years drove for Mattox Transfer and Storage.

On June 12, 1948 he married Lois Knutson at Bethesda Lutheran Church in Ames and two years later at the age of 25, began his career as an Ames firefighter. David and Lois would have a daughter, Gail Ann, who would be 14 months at the time of his death. To add to the tragedy, David was actually the second boy in the family to be killed while working. His brother Dwight had been electrocuted just six months prior while working as a lineman in Le Mars, Iowa.

### The Building

The Harrison Publishing building at 409 Douglas was probably very well known to the members of the Ames Fire Department. This was not only because of its 75 yard proximity to the Fire Station, but because of the relative frequency with which fires occurred there.

Many retired firefighters today have told stories of additional fires being fought in the exact building, and in

the row of structures connected to it. It was only three years after David's death that another firefighter would become trapped in an adjoining building to the north, only to be pulled to safety via rope by a fellow firefighter.

### The Fire

The Harrison Publishing company had several large printing presses on the ground floor, and kept a very large stock of paper in the basement. It was determined that the fire started in the basement in a pile of rubbish. The fire was allowed to grow completely unchecked for some time, evidenced by the late night alarm, and the fact that several locations of the ground floor had burned completely through into the basement. There were two large printer's stones that had come crashing through the floor into the basement, and the fire burned hot enough that it destroyed equipment on the second floor.



The initial alarm was received three minutes before a bitter midnight, just a few degrees above freezing with 16 firefighters arriving to find heavy smoke conditions throughout the building. They immediately began making trips into the building with their Mine Safety brand gas masks. The gas masks made at that time would not prove effective against the amount of smoke being produced.

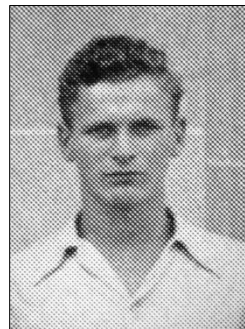
Multiple trips quickly proved unsuccessful in finding the seat of the fire that was now smoldering in the basement releasing tremendous amounts of toxic smoke and fumes. It was during these trips that David's foot somehow became trapped at the bottom of the basement stairs. He tried violently to free himself, but was unable to and was overcome by the smoke, becoming unresponsive.

Another firefighter who was with David also tried frantically to free him, but was unable and also became overcome by smoke. Once alerted to the situation of the downed firefighters, a rescue attempt brought both

men out and into the alley next to the building. David's partner was able to regain consciousness, but it was a grim scene as the resuscitator was brought to David's side, witnessed by what had now become a large audience of citizens awakened by the fire.



Firefighters on the scene attempted to revive David before transporting him to Mary Greeley in an ambulance. Unfortunately the attempts to revive him were unsuccessful and he passed away at 1:30 am, less than two hours after the initial alarm. Seven other firefighters were also hospitalized as a result of the fire. George (Judd) Thompson, Paul Gammon, Kenneth Taylor (who would eventually become Chief), Bayard Lodden, Earl Quade, Max Tevebaugh, and Virgil Magoon, a volunteer, would all be released from the hospital in the next few days after being treated for smoke inhalation and burns. The high number of men hospitalized is a testament to the efforts that went into the rescue of their downed fellow firefighter and friend.



As we celebrate 150 years of our great Ames community, we must look back at the history that made this town what it is today. There has been ingenuity, progress, joy, and even tragedy etched into our history forever. Remembering the sacrifices of our own hero, David Sills and the sacrifices of other public servants

through the years is an important way to maintain the pride we have in the community and to honor the people that help make this town such a great place to live.

It has been said before that Ames is like our own little "Mayberry". While this may be true, it is not on accident. It is because of the tireless efforts of our public safety defenders who put their lives on the line every day, and occasionally even give their last breath in the service of this great place, and the people who inhabit it.

Ames Historical Society  
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Ames, Iowa 50010

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Return Service Requested

Leadership Ames Class #27 visited the History Center in May. The 9-month program introduces both experienced and developing leaders to organizations and people throughout the community. We were very pleased to have this group visit and tour!



### Is it time to renew your membership?

Renewals are due on the one-year anniversary of last year's payment. Check this newsletter's label for information about your membership. Memberships fund the day-to-day operations of the Society, allowing us to continue to be a valued community resource. We thank you!

Introductory - 1st year	\$15	Partner	\$250
Basic	\$30	Benefactor	\$500
Friend	\$50	Patron	\$1,000
Sustaining	\$100		

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

**Ames Historical Society, PO Box 821, Ames, IA 50010**

### Yes! I'd like to help bring John home!

I would like to help with the restoration of the John Blair portrait and enclose a donation of \$\_\_\_\_\_.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

**Send to:**

**Ames Historical Society, PO Box 821, Ames, IA 50010**



### Bring John Blair Home!

Donations to restore the 1880 portrait of Ames' founder, railroadman John Blair, now total \$4,835 toward our \$7,600 goal!

Will you help **Bring John Home?**